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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK  
DE RUEHGB #1047/01 0970726  
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FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6662  
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 001047

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/06/2018  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [KDEM](#) [SOCI](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: SAI LEADER SHEIKH AHMED SPEAKS ON HIS NEW  
POLITICAL PARTY

REF: BAGHDAD 932

Classified By: PRT Anbar Team Leader Jim Soriano for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (U) This is a PRT Anbar reporting cable.

#### Summary

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[1](#)2. (C) Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, leader of the Iraq Awakening Movement, or Sahawa Al-Iraq (SAI), spoke to us on April 2 for over two hours about SAI's movement towards becoming a national political party, his personal attitude on the upcoming elections, the intra-Shi'a violence in Basrah and Baghdad, SAI participation on the Anbar Provincial Council (PC), his feelings about the Sunni Tawafuq bloc, and his recent resignation from the Anbar Higher Committee (AHC). End Summary.

#### A Growing Organization

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[1](#)3. (C) MNF-West and PRT representatives met with Sheikh Ahmed Abu Risha, leader of the Iraq Awakening Movement, or Sahawa Al-Iraq (SAI), on April 2 at his Ramadi compound. Ahmed appeared relaxed having just recently returned from a trip to Kuwait. Ahmed told us that his new political party, officially called the Conference of Awakening, is growing and has aspirations beyond Anbar Province. To set up SAI political offices, the organization identifies 13-15 local supporters who in turn have a target of recruiting 3,000 supporters in that area. If the staff does not obtain at least 500 signatures, SAI closes that office. He told us that he plans to open offices in Diyala, Mosul, Salah ad Din, and Kirkuk.

[1](#)4. (C) The SAI political party nerve center appears to be a 20-person office located in the house of Ahmed's late brother, Sheikh Sattar, which is near Ahmed's residence. Ahmed showed us the office, which houses numerous cabinets containing volumes of three-ringed binders filled with membership application forms. Ahmed said that each binder represented an SAI field office, and that supporters, bio data and photos are culled to be entered into a database. He said currently there are over 200 offices in and outside of Anbar.

#### Response to Intra-Shi'a Violence

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[1](#)5. (C) Ahmed said he had telephoned PM Maliki to offer his support during the recent intra-Shia violence in Basra and elsewhere. He endorsed Maliki's fight to disband all "outlaw" militias. He said that he had gone on TV Arabia and Radio Sawa to emphasize that only the Iraqi Police and Iraqi Army, and those legally authorized to be armed, should possess weapons.

¶6. (C) Asked about his relationship with Maliki, Ahmed said that the PM "respects me because I have the Americans, support. Otherwise he would treat me like a dog." He criticized Maliki for having created, in his view, a sectarian Iraqi Security Force (ISF) that is not loyal to the state. He said it was shameful that members of the IP had turned over their weapons to Jaysh Al-Madhi (JAM). He suggested that Maliki should engage tribal leaders to recruit "from our own sons," in both the south and north, to build non-sectarian security forces that resemble the ISF of pre-2003 to combat illegal militias and Al Qaeda in Iraq. He said that previously tribes had banded together to defend Basrah during the Iran-Iraq war, and that they would reunite to fight the "bandits and militias" and defend Iraq from what the Sheikh called "Iran's aggression." He added that Maliki would prefer to weaken SAI rather than face it as a political competitor.

#### Tawafuq's Silence is Disappointing

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¶7. (C) Ahmed said he was disappointed by Tawafuq's reaction during the recent crisis, and stated that the bloc had abandoned Maliki because they did not want to be tainted by any failure on his part to defeat illegal militias. In his opinion, disarming these criminal gangs was the correct move, and one that Tawafuq should have supported.

#### Anbar Higher Committee

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¶8. (C) Ahmed had little to say about his March 24 statement of resignation from the Anbar Higher Committee (reftel),

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apart from the fact that he did not see any utility in that body, pointing out that SAI members are now focused on the upcoming provincial elections and, in the meantime, are comfortable working with the Provincial Council. Ahmed affirmed that "the correct place for SAI is to support and defend the Provincial Council." When a visitor observed that attendance by SAI members at the Provincial Council meetings was intermittent at best, Ahmed expressed surprise and pledged that all nine members would attend the next PC meeting on April 10. He said he supported the removal of any SAI member from the Council for absenteeism.

#### Comment

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¶9. (C) Ahmed exuded confidence and pride while showing us SAI's burgeoning political apparatus, and asserted SAI will do well in the upcoming provincial elections. Conversely, he remains vigilant that SAI's increasing political popularity could be perceived as a threat to Shi'a leadership in Baghdad and the south, and could trigger a knee-jerk reaction from those organizations to stop SAI. Although Maliki may raise opposition to SAI expansion, especially in the south, Ahmed appears content to play within the rules while continuing to pledge his full support for Maliki's government. End Comment.  
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